



Billing Code: 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XE908

Marine Mammals; File No. 20599

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center, Antarctic Ecosystem Research Division, La Jolla, California, (Responsible Party: George Watters, Ph.D., Director), has applied in due form for a permit to conduct research on marine mammals in the Antarctic.

DATES: Written, telefaxed, or e-mail comments must be received on or before *[insert date 30 days after date of publication in the **FEDERAL REGISTER**]*.

ADDRESSES: The application and related documents are available for review by selecting "Records Open for Public Comment" from the "Features" box on the Applications and Permits for Protected Species (APPS) home page, <https://apps.nmfs.noaa.gov>, and then selecting File No. 20599 from the list of available applications.

These documents are also available upon written request or by appointment in the Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301) 427-8401; fax (301) 713-0376.

Written comments on this application should be submitted to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, at the address listed above. Comments may also be submitted by facsimile to (301) 713-0376, or by email to *NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov*. Please include the File No. in the subject line of the email comment.

Those individuals requesting a public hearing should submit a written request to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division at the address listed above. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sara Young or Amy Sloan, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject permit is requested under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (MMPA; 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*), the regulations governing the taking and importing of marine mammals (50 CFR part 216).

The applicant requests a five-year permit to take Antarctic fur seals (*Arctocephalus gazella*), southern elephant seals (*Mirounga leonina*), crabeater seals (*Lobodon carcinophagus*), leopard seals (*Hydrurga leptonyx*), Ross seals (*Ommatophoca rossii*), and Weddell seals (*Leptonychotes weddellii*) for life history studies and census surveys for abundance and distribution of pinnipeds in the South Shetland Islands, Antarctica, as part of a long-term ecosystem monitoring program established in 1986. The applicant also requests permission to import tissue samples collected from any animals captured and from salvaged carcasses of any species of pinniped or cetacean found in the study area.

The applicant requests annual capture of: 200 Antarctic fur seal adults and juveniles; 600 Antarctic fur seal pups; 50 leopard seal adults and juveniles; 50 southern elephant seal adults and juveniles; 100 southern elephant seal pups; 30 Weddell seal adults and juveniles; and 20 Weddell seal pups. Research on captured animals would include tissue sampling, attachment of scientific instruments, application of marks (flipper tags, hair bleach or dye), morphometric measurement, tooth extraction, and stomach content sampling. An additional 23,000 Antarctic fur seals, 1,100 southern elephant seals, 100 crabeater seals, 100 leopard seals, 200 Weddell seals, and 5 Ross seals would be taken annually by harassment during aerial and ground surveys, including behavioral observations and photo-identification. The applicant has requested an annual incidental mortality allowance of: 3 Antarctic fur seal adults or juveniles; 5 Antarctic fur seal pups; 2 leopard seal adults or juveniles; 2 southern elephant seal adults or juveniles; 2 southern elephant seal pups; 2 Weddell seal adults or juveniles; and 2 Weddell seal pups.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), an initial determination has been made that the activity proposed is categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Concurrent with the publication of this notice in the **Federal Register**, NMFS is forwarding copies of the application to the Marine Mammal Commission and its Committee of Scientific Advisors.

Dated: September 26, 2016.

Julia Harrison,

Chief, Permits and Conservation Division,

Office of Protected Resources,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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